

The years 2011 and 2012 brought waves of political unrest in North Africa and across the Arab world. Egypt and Tunisia experienced massive protests that eventually toppled long-time presidents. An ongoing series of violent protests and political demonstrations continued until recently in Yemen and Libya, the former leading Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to sign a power-transfer deal in November 2011 and the latter evolving into a civil war that defeated and killed the dictator **Muammar Gaddafi**. Syria remains unsettled but also drifted from political anger into open revolt. The uprisings in the past two years spawned a new generation of activists who have reinvented massive street action as a means of political expression organized and advanced through social media.

This research examines the use of social media as related to these Arab protests and civic unrest, testing the widespread belief that the communication revolutions of the Internet and social media played a large role in the political revolutions sometimes known as the Arab Spring. The researchers take a two-pronged approach. Initially, we examine the pre-uprising communication firmament in Egypt, specifically seeking correlation between heavy Internet use and political dissatisfaction. This will be done using a secondary analysis of the Egypt portion of the 2008 World Values Survey. Secondly, we use secondary analysis of the Arab Barometer, first wave 2006-2007, seeking further confirmation of the association between heavier Internet use and greater political dissatisfaction.

The goal is not to quantify the roles of Internet and social media use during the actual uprisings. Instead, the objective is to examine the extent that these communication tools were known and available to, and frequently used by, those who were politically aching for change. When conditions arose making political revolt possible, the

groundwork had been laid for how the Internet and social media became useful, and perhaps necessary, tools for organizing the revolt.

Literature Review

For thirty years Egypt had been under the rule of President Hosni Mubarak. He managed to maintain power despite various incidents of popular unrest, such as the Kefaya of Kifaya (Arabic for “enough”) movement in 2004-5. That uprising strongly campaigned against corruption and Mubarak’s authoritarian policies. To forestall future revolts, Mubarak implemented an array of emergency laws leftover from the Arab-Israeli war. These practices, mixed with an intentional weakening of political opposition, allowed Mubarak to rule as a quasi-dictator (Bery, 2011).

Mubarak’s biggest problem, though, was Egypt’s deep domestic problems, ranging from corruption to police brutality. Poverty was another major contributor, as millions of Egyptians lived on less than \$2 a day (Pintak, 2011). These problems gradually led the public to revolt and to oust him from the presidency (Faris, 2008).

Initially, the Mubarak government, similar to the governments in other Northern Africa and Middle Eastern countries, strongly promoted Internet use in Egypt to create a strong information-literate society. This popularization led to increased Internet communication that openly criticized the regime. Users organized protests online even before the recent uprisings, and often avoided any repercussions (Hamdy, 2004). Egyptian bloggers straddled between political activists and online journalists as they reported stories that were prohibited by mainstream news outlets (Pintak, 2011). Many

internet-facilitated organizational efforts exposed cases of police corruption, harassment, and anti-democratic policies (Faris, 2008).

The Internet was used as a tool of the movement against Mubarak. Protestors employed various tactics: social media organizing, encryption strategies for encoded messages, sharing online content, and using online maps for tactical purposes (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011). Generally, social media platforms were, at least initially, a valuable source of communication and coordination, as protesters in various cities gradually joined in the revolution.

Political discussions also flourished on Facebook. It had four million users in Egypt by 2010 (Howard, 2010). The now famous “We are all Khaled Said” page quickly became a critical arena for organizing and spreading awareness of protests. The memorial page was created after Khaled Said was beaten to death by Egyptian police officers. Post-mortem photos of Said went viral, sparking worldwide outrage (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011). Twitter also engaged followers, especially in bridging Egypt to neighboring countries. Much of the early news of the protests spread to the outside world through Facebook and Twitter before reaching traditional news media (Lotan, Graeff, Annanny, Gaffney, Pearle, and Boyd, 2011). Even after mainstream communication outlets published a story, many young Arabs were neglecting the stories because they didn’t trust the content (Pintak, 2011).

The open streams of information and communication raised red flags for Mubarak. He resorted to his emergency laws and imposed serious repercussions, especially on traditional media outlets; the government even closed TV channels on grounds of public order and national security in an attempt to control communication outlets (Pintak, 2011). The Egyptian government installed software that enabled the state to monitor heavily

Internet traffic with particular interest in social networks, email, and Skype (Ackerman, 2011). When the police monitoring increased, protesters began avoiding such applications for political rallying (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011). Eventually, all Internet communications were disabled nationwide in order to prevent the protesters' ability to organize and gather through social media. Those who cooperated with the media, such as cyber-protestor Wael Ghonem, were arrested and detained. During this time, several residents reported that cell phone service was down and even landline phone service was sporadic (Kazamias, 2011). The Internet disappearance would not, however, inhibit the tens of thousands of Egyptians who protested on the streets of major cities - including Tahrir Square in Cairo.

Protesters relied heavily on the Internet and social media as communication technologies. The protests, sit-ins and political demonstrations show the combination of different social networking platforms were crucial in the manifestation of the rebellions. They also were critical in supporting and spreading revolutionary events to surrounding nations (Khamis and Vaughan, 2011).

On February 11, 2011, Mubarak resigned from his presidency and handed power to the armed forces of Egypt who dissolved the Parliament, suspended the Constitution of Egypt, and promised to dispose the emergency laws (Bly, 2011).

Again, most protesters did generally rely on traditional ways of communicating and organizing beyond the Internet, especially after the initial protests and when, in this case, the Internet was shut down (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011). Even protesters who heavily relied on the Internet eventually only used technological platforms for private exchanges of information with trusted friends, for fear of penetration by the regime (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011).

The popular press often has cited social networking as a catalyst for many of the Arab Spring protests, demonstrations, and riots. However, the actual role of social media during the Arab Spring has been hotly debated (Youmas and York, 2012). Some researchers claim social media to be only the tool that ignited the uprisings while others say it was the main prompt. Kazamias (2011) argues that citizens only used the networks initially to reach out to other potential rebels, but eventually turned to more traditional forms of communication. He says information networks like Facebook and Twitter sparked the uprisings, however, he suggests that older technologies, even word of mouth, were more important tools. Either way, social media use has demonstrated to the world its influence; internet-facilitated information allowed the world to connect with the protestors and in some cases assisted in organizing the protests themselves (Schillinger, 2011). For example, Facebook messages revealed that “group members” were assigned to inform at least 10 individuals outside of the group about upcoming demonstrations and events (Kazamias, 2011).

The Spring 2012 edition of *Arab Media & Society* had four articles addressing the role of the internet in general, and social media in particular, in the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. Dajani (2012) warned against overstatement of the influence of such media forms, arguing that scholars and critics were repeating the errors of “magic bullet” media effects theories tossed around in the 1920s in response to the new media of radio and film. He declared, “Facebook, the Internet and satellite television could call Egyptians to the streets, but it could not have sustained a mass movement had it not been for the direct contact among people.”

Furthermore, Dajani noted, the uprisings should not be jammed into a western

media frame of yearning for democracy. Instead, he argues, protesters were moved by frustrated desires for pride, dignity, and opportunity, expressed more in group than in individual terms. He claims the notion that “what is foreign shines” as the rush to adopt technology is matched by the unquestioned adoption of some Western values and explanations.

Hassan (2012) went further, suggesting that the speed of the new technology gives rise to venting but rarely allows for the slower rhythms of democracy. Social networks thus give rise to a political vacuum, and something quite different from the vague “people power” will fill that void.

Egypt is the largest social media market and Saudi Arabia is the third largest, noted Samin (2012), writing from the relative tranquility of the latter. He contends that social media serve to accelerate processes already afoot; each society has different underlying dynamics more relevant to the success or failure of social movements.

The three critiques nicely put forth questions partially answered by a peer-reviewed research article in the same edition (Khamis, Gold, and Vaughan, 2012). The researchers tracked some of the history and factors at play in both Egypt and Syria. They properly note that Egypt has “a persistent gap between the young online political activists on the one hand and the broad offline Egyptian population on the other.” Facebook users, they postulate, can be viewed as small in number, but influential in discourse. They must be. Internet access remains costly and the Egyptian illiteracy rate exceeds 40 percent, the authors properly recognize.

Syria has used techniques of repression and suppression to make difficult and

dangerous both online and in-person collaboration for political change, serving as an example of Samin's point about underlying dynamics. In addition, while Egypt's online community may have had success in motivating large numbers to the cause of Kefaya, it lost to on-the-ground organized Islamist parties in 2011 parliamentary elections; in March of the same year those same face-to-face forces won on questions of constitutional amendments.

Khamis, Gold and Vaughan (2012) quote Gallup in pointing out that only eight percent of Egyptians got their news from Facebook or Twitter during January and February of 2011; only 17% had home internet connections. Most, 63 percent, got news of the protests from Al Jazeera, the satellite delivered TV news operation (see Hellyer, 2012).

The overwhelming use of social media in the Egyptian Revolution likely indicates the demographics of the people who essentially were powering the Arab Spring. Young people fueled the revolts of the various Arab countries by using their abilities to navigate social networking to release the word of uprising to surrounding cities and nations all over the world. This also may indicate that the protestors shared common dissatisfactions within their economic, social and especially political standing in their respective countries. This leads to the following hypotheses:

- *H1*: There will be a positive relationship in the World Values Survey between Egyptian social and political dissatisfaction and Internet use.
- *H2*: There will be a positive relationship among Arab Barometer respondents between social and political dissatisfaction and Internet use.

Methods

The following research compares several variables measuring Egyptian social and political satisfaction and Internet use. The data analyzed are from the 2008 World Values Survey; wave five of the project and covering the years 2005 to 2008. This wave was done in 54 countries. The World Values Survey describes itself as “a worldwide network of studies measuring changing values and their impact on social and political life” (Inglehart, 2012).

The Egyptian portion of the 2008 World Values Survey sampled households in the extended roster for the post-enumeration survey of the 2006 Census, covering about 1.8 percent of the total population. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in Arabic. To reduce sampling error, the study selected only 25 households using systematic random sampling from each of 480 segments (areas in which study was conducted) that was proportional to the nation’s size according to the 2006 population census. This study was conducted from March 15, 2008 through April 5, 2008.

Measurement of Egyptian social and political satisfaction and Internet use was recorded based on responses to the following questions from the 2008 World Values Survey.

Internet use: dependent variable

- V₂₂₈: “People use different sources to learn what is going on in their country and the world. For each of the following sources, please indicate whether you used (the Internet) last week or did not use it last week to obtain information (read out and code one answer).”

Possible responses: *Used last week, Not used last week*

Additional responses were: *Missing, Not asked, Not applicable, No answer, Don't Know.*

These responses were recoded to equal *System Unavailable*.

Social and political satisfaction: independent variables

➤ *V₁₀*: “Taking all things together, would you say you are?”

Possible responses: *Very happy, Quite happy, Not very happy, Not at all happy*

Additional responses were: *Missing, Not asked, Not applicable, No answer, Don't Know.*

These responses were recoded to equal *System Unavailable*.

➤ *V₂₂*: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Using this card on which 1 means you are “completely dissatisfied” and 10 means you are “completely satisfied” where would you put your satisfaction with your life as a whole?”

Possible responses: *1 Dissatisfied, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Satisfied*

Additional responses were: *Missing, Not asked, Not applicable, No answer, Don't Know.*

These responses were recoded to equal *System Unavailable*.

➤ *V₁₃₈*: “I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?”

“The government (in your nation’s capital)”

Possible responses: *A great deal, Quite a lot, Not very much, None at all*

Additional responses were: *Missing, Not asked, Not applicable, No answer, Don't Know.*

These responses were recoded to equal *System Unavailable*.

➤ *V₁₆₂*: How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 1 means it is “not at all important” and 10

means “absolutely important” what position would you choose?

Possible responses: *1 Not at all important, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Absolutely important*

Additional responses were: *Missing, Not asked, Not applicable, No answer, Don't Know.*

These responses were recoded to equal *System Unavailable*.

Arab Barometer (2012) used face-to-face interviews among citizens over the age of 18. It was done in Arabic, and used a cluster stratification plan similar to World Values Survey. Arab Barometer was done as follows: Algeria, sample size of 1300, Fall 2006; Jordan, sample size of 1143, Spring 2006; Lebanon, sample size of 1195, Fall 2007; Morocco, sample size of 1277, Fall 2006; Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), sample size of 1270, Spring 2006; Yemen, sample size of 717, Fall 2007.

Internet usage was measured with the question (222q) “How often do you use the internet. The answering options: Daily or almost daily, at least once a week, at least once a month, several times a year, or I do not use the internet. The answers were reverse coded so one equaled Do Not Use, two was several times a year, 3 was at least once a month, 4 was at least once a week, and 5 was daily or almost daily. This was done to create an easily understood scale where higher numbers correlated with greater use.

The Arab Barometer scaled question about Internet use then could be used for regressions against scaled questions on other matters. Those simple regressions were run against: 13 questions about life satisfaction, interest in politics, and participation in public life; 16 questions about democracy and various nation states; and 14 about governance issues.

Findings

In the World Values Survey 17,642 Egyptian respondents (28.2 percent) reported using the Internet in the past week while 45,082 (71.8 percent) reported they had not. Comparison of responses to the dependent variable (V_{228}) tested with the independent variables (V_{10} , V_{22} , V_{138} , and V_{162}) yielded results that generally supported Hypothesis One. Contrary to prediction, Egyptians who used the Internet actually reported being happier than non-users. One suspects that might be a consequence of having the wealth to acquire such communication resources. Egyptian Internet users compared to non-users, as predicted, were more dissatisfied overall with their life. Furthermore, Internet users compared to non-users were more dissatisfied with government. They also valued democracy more than non-users. All differences were statistically significant at the $p < .0001$ level (Table 1).

The simple regressions using the Arab Barometer supported Hypothesis Two. At highly significant levels ($p < .0001$) as Internet use increased, so did:

- regarding the current political situation as bad, and describing it as poor,
- saying you have a substantial interest in politics,
- spending time overseas,
- regarding your town as unsafe, and thinking you were safer 3-5 years ago,
- rejecting the notion that people should support government decisions even if one disagrees with those decisions.

At slightly less overwhelming, but still statistically significant ($p < .022$) levels, greater Internet use also correlated with describing the current economic situation of one's country as poor. These generally dour financial sentiments, however, were societal

not personal. Heavier Internet use also correlated with rating the economic situation of your family as good (Table 2).

Heavier Internet use also was associated with greater faith in democracy. Heavy users were more likely than others to prefer a democratic system, and reject a strong leader with no parliament model. Heavier users also were more likely than others to see Japan and the United States as more of a complete democracy, and more likely to see Saudi Arabia, China, and their own country as drifting toward the dictatorship end of the spectrum (Table 3).

Governance issues also showed some trends. Heavier users of the Internet were less likely than others to see government's role as dealing with deteriorating moral values. Heavy users tended more than others to describe as good a multiparty parliamentary system. Heavy users also were more likely to have little to no confidence in the current Prime Minister and Parliament (Table 4).

Discussion

Egyptian Internet users shared certain social and political dissatisfaction that exceeded the dissatisfaction of non-users in 2008. Recognizing that more dissatisfied Egyptians used the Internet at that time is important as it preceded severe political unrest. Internet-facilitated networks allowed Egyptian rebels to connect with one another to organize riots and protests. Growing nationwide anger could have been predicted based on the population who was using the Internet and were already socially and politically dissatisfied. These rebels took advantage of their access to a platform with opportunities

to reach out to other potential rebels in mass quantities to gather information and share ideas. It is no surprise that the violent uprisings and eventual ousting of President Hosni Mubarak followed the cyber meetings.

There were no questions related to social media use in the 2008 World Values Survey but it appears reasonable and likely that mere Internet use expanded to include the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Skype. The Arab Barometer data also enhance and clarify these conclusions. One must remember the Internet is a fluid and fast medium with little care or respect for national boundaries. Throughout the Middle East and North Africa a politically frustrated group, often middle class and young, found support, sustenance, and community online. They shared a common language, Arabic, and a common sense that one need not be satisfied with a long-established but corrupt and undemocratic order. The outcomes may differ by nation state, but these secondary analyses clearly show that the online communication environment helped prompt revolt, even if that revolt later moved to other persons and grew by face-to-face and other traditional communication.

If their website projections are accurate, both World Values Survey and Arab Barometer expect to complete a new wave of surveys in late 2012 that should be available presumably by 2013. The new data should offer even more insights into the role of social media during the actual revolt period. This work, however, shows that the communication and political environments were primed and ready when circumstances unleashed what became known as the Arab Spring.

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Table 1. T-tests, World Values Survey in Egypt. Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Government Confidence, and Importance of Democracy versus Internet Use

| Question | Internet | Mean | Std. Dev. | N | t | p |
|----------------------|----------|------|-----------|-------|---------|--------|
| | | | | | | |
| Happiness | User | 1.76 | .635 | 16415 | 26.7737 | <.0001 |
| | Non-User | 1.94 | .750 | 36887 | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Life Satisfaction | User | 7.35 | 1.844 | 16415 | 31.4798 | <.0001 |
| | Non-User | 6.71 | 2.296 | 36887 | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Govt. Confidence | User | 2.63 | .833 | 16415 | 17.5857 | <.0001 |
| | Non-User | 2.48 | .941 | 36887 | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Importance Democracy | User | 8.98 | 1.497 | 16415 | 18.3152 | <.0001 |
| | Non-User | 8.70 | 1.685 | 36887 | | |

Table 2. Regression, Arab Barometer: Internet Use and Satisfaction/Interest/Participation

| Question | Beta | T | p |
|--|-------|---------|------|
| Current political situation (very good to very bad) | .057 | 4.326 | .000 |
| Current overall economic condition of your country | .044 | 2.295 | .022 |
| State of your country's economy in 3-5 years | -.025 | -1.594 | .111 |
| Rate the economic situation of your family today | -.178 | -11.116 | .000 |
| Impact government policies have on your daily life | .025 | 1.869 | .062 |
| How would you describe present political situation | .083 | 4.665 | .000 |
| Freeness and Fairness of the Last National Election | .066 | 4.183 | .000 |
| How Interested Would You Say You Are in Politics | -.139 | -7.098 | .000 |
| How Often Follow News about Politics/Govt. | .015 | .783 | .434 |
| People should support govt. decisions even if disagree | .071 | 4.472 | .000 |
| Time Spent Overseas in Past Five Years | .144 | 11.253 | .000 |
| City/town safety: unsafe to safe | -.051 | -3.935 | .000 |
| Safety compared to 3-5 years ago: less, same, more | .050 | 3.730 | .000 |

Table 3. Regression, Arab Barometer: Internet Use and Democracy

| Question | Beta | T | p |
|---|-------|--------|------|
| Iran (1 Complete Dictatorship to 10 Complete Democracy) | -.007 | -.303 | .762 |
| Turkey (same scale) | -.018 | -.710 | .478 |
| Saudi Arabia (same scale) | -.109 | -4.381 | .000 |
| Japan (same scale) | .113 | 4.252 | .000 |
| United States (same scale) | .064 | 2.379 | .017 |
| China (same scale) | -.072 | -2.722 | .007 |
| Israel (same scale) | .029 | 1.118 | .264 |
| Your Country (same scale) | -.067 | -2.879 | .004 |
| Democracy: Economy Runs Badly | .000 | .018 | .986 |
| Democracy: Indecisive and Quibbling | -.037 | -2.116 | .034 |
| Democracy: Not Good at Maintaining Order | .054 | 3.000 | .003 |
| Democracy: Better than any other form of government | -.038 | -2.625 | .009 |
| Political Systems: Democratic System | -.047 | -3.222 | .001 |
| Political Systems: Strong Leader, No Parliament | .125 | 8.268 | .000 |
| Political Systems: Experts rather than government | .002 | .132 | .895 |
| Political Systems: Mix of Three, One Ruler | .043 | 2.734 | .006 |

Table 4. Arab Barometer: Internet Use and Governance Issues

| Question | Beta | T | p |
|---|--------|--------|------|
| Good Way Governing: Parliamentary, all parties compete | -1.091 | -3.417 | .001 |
| Parliamentary, only Islamic parties | .704 | 1.094 | .274 |
| Strong President and Military, parliament not important | 1.023 | 2.241 | .025 |
| Islamic Law, no parties or elections | -.693 | -1.141 | .254 |
| | | | |
| Present Government: Managing Economy | -.018 | -.868 | .385 |
| Creating Jobs | -.026 | -1.185 | .236 |
| Narrowing Gap between Rich and Poor | .042 | 1.944 | .052 |
| Addressing Educational Needs | -.026 | -1.156 | .248 |
| Dealing with Deteriorating Moral Values | .080 | 3.966 | .000 |
| | | | |
| Confidence: Prime Minister (1 none to 4 great deal) | -.064 | -3.527 | .000 |
| Confidence: Courts | .000 | .010 | .992 |
| Confidence: Parliament | -.059 | -3.196 | .001 |
| Confidence: Police | .011 | .666 | .506 |
| Confidence: Political Parties | .022 | 1.361 | .173 |